

News

Northwestern Law's Commitment to Anti-Racism

 June 12, 2020

To the Northwestern Law Community,

On May 29, 2020, I sent out a message to the Law School community about the horrific pattern of racial violence evidenced by the recent killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and so many others. On June 3, we heard members of our community reflect on their own painful experiences with everyday racism.

Since then, I have received many thoughtful responses and honest, constructive feedback from members of the Law School community who have shared their concerns, critiques and sincere desire for change, along with a commitment to move the Law School community forward on its path to achieving racial justice. I am particularly grateful to Black members of our community who have taken the time to share their stories, as well as others who have brought to my attention the ways in which they experience the Law School.

In this time of national reckoning, Northwestern Law is especially focused on ending any vestige of systemic racism. To move us forward, I recognize that it is not merely enough to say that our community stands on the side of racial justice. We must commit to become an anti-racist community that

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actively works to dismantle the system of racism that plagues our society and institutions. Northwestern Law will not be complicit in perpetuating a system that devalues Black members of our Law School community as well as other people of color. Black Lives Matter to me and to Northwestern Law, and we commit to reflecting this in our actions and environment.

Starting now, the senior leadership team and I commit to fostering and creating a Law School community premised on and dedicated to anti-racism. As an institution, we will not sit on the sidelines as the Black members of our community bear the pain and anger associated with navigating a society replete with systemic racism or with navigating our campus—where, above all, they should feel seen, heard, supported, and treated equitably and with respect.

We will take action, and we will do so more swiftly than we have thus far. This letter outlines a few of my immediate commitments:

- **Faculty Hiring:** Hiring more Black faculty and faculty of color – and retaining and promoting those faculty members—is a top priority for me. We need to build a faculty that is reflective of our student body and the Law School's diverse ideals. I am pleased that both of our faculty hires this past year, Paul Gowder, who will join our tenure-line faculty, and Robin Walker Sterling, who will join our faculty as the Mayer Brown/Robert A. Helman Professor of Law and director of the Bluhm Legal Clinic, will help further this goal. This is only a start. In addition to recruiting diverse full-time hires, we will prioritize this through visiting faculty and adjunct hires.
- **Leadership and Training:** My senior leadership team is a diverse group of 13 individuals of whom four are people of color. I value the advice and guidance that this group provides to me, but it is clear that there is more work that I need to do and more that I need to learn in order to

This summer, my senior leadership team and I will participate in anti-racism training. Following that training, I will ask all members of the senior leadership team to review their work through a lens of anti-racism and to identify action items they can take within their roles and departments over the next year. Faculty and senior staff will complete anti-racism training in the 2020-2021 academic year. The Office of Inclusion & Engagement and Student Services will collaborate on developing mandatory online diversity programming for all students during the 2020-2021 academic year.

- **Performance Excellence:** Beginning with the 2020-2021 academic year, all Northwestern Law school employees will include a performance excellence goal around fostering diversity and inclusion within their departments. For faculty, this goal will center on inclusive teaching and learning environments. In addition, supervisors will be trained on best practices for minimizing the role bias plays in the performance evaluation process.
- **Staff Hiring:** All departments seeking to hire new staff members will participate in a session on best practices for hiring to increase the pool of diverse candidates and minimize the role bias plays in hiring decisions.
- **Student Scholarship Support:** The Law School has been committed to supporting students who seek careers in public service. We provided funding of \$8,000 each to more than 150 students this summer, and one year of funding to five graduates working in public interest. Beginning next year, the Law School will create 10 full tuition scholarships for incoming and continuing students committed to pursuing careers furthering racial justice. In addition, we will seek

- **Student Classroom Experience:** Over the past year, I have had conversations with many members of our community about the pain Black students and many other diverse students experience in our classrooms. This is unacceptable and must change. I am committed to engaging our faculty members as partners in this work. Last year we hosted inclusive pedagogy workshops for the faculty. We will continue to develop those efforts along with the anti-racism training and performance evaluation changes described above.
- **Climate Assessment:** As I shared with our community last spring, the Law School is partnering with Rankin & Associates Consulting for purposes of conducting a full assessment of the Law School's climate for learning and working, so that we may better understand the experience of all members of our community. Rankin & Associates will also work with us to develop goals and to provide transparent monitoring of our progress toward meeting them.
- **Community Partnerships:** The Law School sits in the heart of Chicago —a city with a deeply complicated and heartbreakingly struggle with its own racism and police brutality. We engage on these issues through our Clinic and pro bono efforts. Moving forward, the Law School commits to doing more and to being a more active partner in creating an anti-racist Chicago. We will focus this year on building and strengthening institutional efforts to support the rebuilding of Chicago.

Please know that our work does not end with these efforts. We commit to working on other action items to help us build an anti-racist community.

I recognize that some will be tempted to say that the Law School seeks to stifle viewpoints and political diversity. Please take note: The Law School and I will always value academic freedom, and we need to be a place where we can engage in many different ideas and hear from many voices and perspectives. We do not ask you to stifle your views. But we are saying that we will be a community where every member is respected and valued, and we are committed to fostering an anti-racist environment.

Make no mistake, I know that I must be part of the solution for eradicating racism around us. I know that it is my responsibility and that of Law School leadership, *not* of students, to do the work of becoming a community devoted to anti-racism. That said, I want to express my gratitude to the many students who have put in hours of work, on top of the necessary work required to be a law student, to make their voices heard and address a real problem. Thank you. We will continue to welcome your input, but know that now the work is up to us.

Dean Kim Yuracko

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